

Message Text

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SUBJ: SPECIALIZED TRADE MISSIONS: INCREASED ADVANCE OFFICER

REF: STATE A-9156, DEC. 13, 1974; STATE 140278

1. SUMMARY: HAVING RECEIVED TWO TRADE MISSIONS AND TWO ADVANCE OFFICERS DURING THE SIX-MONTH TRIAL PERIOD, WE OFFER HERewith OUR COMMENTS ON THE ROLE OF THE ADVANCE OFFICER, AS REQUESTED. IN SHORT, WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE ADVANCE OFFICER HAS NO USEFUL ROLE TO PLAY AND MORE OFTEN THAN NOT UTILIZED POST STAFF TIME THAT COULD BE FRUITFULLY DEVOTED TO MISSION OR OTHER MATTERS. END SUMMARY

2. THERE MUST NOW BE RELATIVELY FEW FOREIGN SERVICE POSTS AT WHICH NO ONE HAS HAD EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIALIZED TRADE MISSIONS. THE PREPARATORY WORK NECESSARY TO A SUCCESSFUL MISSION VISIT IS NOT DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND OR PLAN. ITS EXECUTION IS OFTEN, PROBABLY ALWAYS, A MAJOR EFFORT ON THE PART OF THE POST, JUST AS RECRUITMENT OF MISSIONS GENERALLY REQUIRES A MAJOR EFFORT BY COMMERCE. THE ON-SITE PREPARATIONS, IN IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES, BEGIN SEVERAL MONTHS IN ADVANCE OF THE MISSION'S ARRIVAL. IF RECRUITMENT IS COMPLETED SUFFICIENTLY IN ADVANCE, AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS ARE ADDRESSED AND RESOLVED IN GOOD TIME, PREPARATIONS SHOULD BE LARGELY CONCLUDED A FULL MONTH IN ADVANCE, WITH ONLY THE APPOINTMENTS

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SCHEULE REMAINING TO BE FILLED OUT.

3. REPAIR MENTIONS AS POINTS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST THE ADVANCE OFFICER'S EFFECTIVENESS IN INCREASING "THE QUALITY OF BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS, ENSURING AN ADEQUATE APPOINTMENT SCHEDULE FOR EACH MISSION MEMBER, AND LIGHTENING-THE POST'S BURDEN". THE QUALITY AND NUMBER OF BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS ARE NOT A FUNCTION OF THE ADVANCE OFFICER'S VISIT BUT RATHER OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LOCAL PUBLICITY AND RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGNS, AND OF THE SUITABILITY OF THE MISSION MEMBER FIRMS TO THE LOCAL MARKET. THE ADVANCE OFFICER CONTRIBUTES NOTHING TO THE SCHEDULING PROCESS, AND OFTEN INTERFERES WITH THE POSTS' GETTING THE JOB DONE IN THE MOST ORDERLY, SYSTEMATIC AND EFFICIENT FASHION.

4. IF ANYTHING, THE ADVANCE OFFICER INCREASES RATHER THAN LIGHTENS THE POSTS' BURDEN. IF HE PAYS CALLS WITHIN THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY, ALMOST INVARIABLY HE REQUIRES A POST ESCORT WHO CAN BRIDGE THE LANGUAGE, CURTURAL, AND INFORMATIONAL GAPS WHICH SEPARATE HIM FROM HIS MOMENTARY SURROUNDINGS. IF HE VISITS THE SITE PLANNED FOR THE MISSION HEADQUARTERS, HIS PRESENCE CAN ONLY CAUSE CONFUSION TO THE HOTEL MANAGEMENT, WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY DEALT AND MUST SUBSEQUENTLY DEAL WITH THE POST. IN ORDER THAT HE SHOULD FEEL AND CAN REPORT THAT HIS VISIT HAS BEEN WORTHWHILE, A PROGRAM MUST BE CREATED FOR HIM. WITHOUT HIM, IT WOULD NOT BE NEEDED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

5. THE POSTS, AND THE POSTS ALONE, BEST KNOW HOW BUSINESS IS DONE WITHIN THEIR PARTICULAR COUNTRY; THE COMPOSITION AND PECULIARITIES OF A PARTICULAR LOCAL INDUSTRY OR SERVICE SECTOR; HOW TO ACHIEVE THE OPTIMUM POSSIBLE PUBLICITY WITH THE MINIMUM POSSIBLE COST; HOW MOST EFFICIENTLY TO HANDLE LOGISTICS WITHIN THE COUNTRY; AND HOW TO PUT TOGETHER THE MOST PRODUCTIVE LOCAL BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS SCHEDULE. NONE OF THESE PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES REQUIRES ASSISTANCE FROM THE OUTSIDE.

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6. IT WAS OUR VIEW UNDER THE OLD ADVANCE OFFICER SYSTEM, AND REMAINS SO FOLLOWING THE PRESENT EXPERIMENT, THAT THE ADVANCE OFFICER HAS NO USEFUL JOB TO PERFORM. WHETHER THE ADVANCE OFFICER COMES THREE MONTHS OR THREE WEEKS EARLY, HE HAS NOTHING TO CONTRIBUTE. WITH LUCK, HE WILL NOT CAUSE MUCH DISTURBANCE; HE CAN, HOWEVER, BE THE SOURCE, WITTINGLY OR UNWITTINGLY, OF CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY. GIVEN

GOOD COMMUNICATION WITH WASHINGTON AND ADEQUATE AND
TIMELY BUDGETARY SUPPORT, THE POSTS CAN HANDLE
ALL PHASES OF PREPARATION ON THEIR OWN.

7. RECENT TRADE MISSIONS TO SWITZERLAND HAVE OPERATED
ON VERY RESTRICTED BUDGETS, WHICH HAS HAMPERED PREPARATION
AND EXECUTION OF THEIR VISITS. YET, CONSIDERABLE SUMS
CONTINUE TO BE DEVOTED TO THE ADVANCE OFFICER'S TRAVELS.
IT WOULD SEEM FAR MORE PRODUCTIVE TO ELIMINATE THIS
EXPENSE AND RECHANNEL THE FUNDS SAVED TO FINANCING
THE MISSION ITSELF MORE ADEQUATELY- OR TO THE
EXPANSION OF TRADE MISSION OR OTHER PROMOTIONAL PROGRAMS.
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